

MY TEN FOOT CIRCLE OF SPACE

Peleliu 1944



Introduction

By the end of the 19th century, the modernization of the explosive artillery shell and development of rapid firing guns had caused battles no longer to be fought in phalanxes, squares, or shoulder-to-shoulder lines of musketeers marching to the beat of drums or wailing bag pipes with brightly colored flags and waving sabers leading. Now, each infantry warrior, soldier or marine, fights his battle in his own personal circle of space. In a battle these individual's circles may just touch for an instant or at times they may share small areas with their comrades or the enemy. In his own personal circle this warrior kills or dies, is victorious or defeated. This is the story of my ten foot circle of space as one of Captain George P. Hunt's Marines at the "Point," our assault and hold objective during this battle action. The "Point" is a coral projection of high ground extending into the water at the end of a long, open, and exposed beach upon which the 1st Marine Division had to land and occupy in order to secure the island. To seize and hold this "Point" was vital to our mission.

My name is Fred K. Fox and I am 69 years old. Today is September the 14th, 1995. It's 3:27 in the afternoon in Austin, Texas. I am going to describe my first combat experience as a young Marine PFC (Private First Class) with the 1st Marine Division, 1st Regiment, 3rd Battalion, K Company and to a certain degree the 3rd Platoon of K Company on the Island of Peleliu.

The Assault

I first saw Peleliu on the morning of September 15, 1944. Perhaps I didn't see Peleliu, exactly. I saw the flash of gunfire off in the distant dark of predawn as LST 227 (Landing Ship Tank, a large shallow draft ship with bow doors and a large bow ramp) slowly plowed its way through the waters of the western Pacific toward the Palau Islands and Peleliu in particular. At about 5:00 a.m., PFC Bill Elderton and I stood on deck and looked at the flashes in the black night miles ahead. The noise from the guns was beyond our hearing. We wondered what was going on.

There was a loud signal from the LST 227 speaker to get in the chow-line. We had steak and eggs, coffee and an orange. As we watched the first flecks of the sun's rays become evident in this black, cool predawn morning, we could begin to see the ships around us. It would be easy to count over a hundred of the many types of U.S. naval ships as they became visible in the increased light. The LST's bull horn gave a loud order for all Marines to clear



our stuff from around the trucks, saltwater distillation units and loaded jeeps and trailers that covered 3/4 of the ship's top deck. The loaded top deck had been our home since we had left Pavavu. This stuff was to go to Peleliu beach after we had won a toe-hold on the Nip island.

We folded our camping cots that had been our bunks for almost two weeks and we stacked them in a designated area. Our transport packs were identified and stacked so they could be brought to the island after the landing.

The ponchos that had shielded us from the equatorial Pacific sun and the biting rain of one heavy south Pacific squall were now folded flat and then folded over our cartridge belts, flopping over the first aid pack in the middle of our backs. In addition, each Marine carried two full canteens of fresh water on his heavy web belt. On the left side of my belt hung a USMC K-Bar knife with the hilt guard bent up on one side. This knife had been sharpened razor sharp during the slow hot hours of this trip. By the left belt clasp was a 45 ammunition clip carrier, and on my right side was a holster with my 45 Colt automatic pistol. Two white phosphorous smoke grenades were in one dungaree jacket pocket and two regular pineapple grenades were in the other. Then, over the belt was a two tube CO2 inflatable life belt. The last to go on would be a loaded 70 pound flame thrower on your back with a gas mask in front on your chest. The four inch shortened canvas leggings, normally part of the herringbone weave green combat uniform, were left behind, leaving just floppy pants legs over the rough-out leather, ankle high boondocker shoes.. (On Pavavu several months earlier, our Colonel Lewis B. Puller, "Chesty", regimental commander of the 1st Marines, ordered that 4 inches be cut off of the top of our canvas leggings. No questions were asked.) This load was all topped off with our camouflaged cloth covered steel helmet. The "782" gear (helmet, pack, belt, canteens, etc) were kept unhooked and loose as long as the tractor containing us was in the water with the possibility we might have to swim. Only the faded black Marine Corps emblem on our jacket's top pocket was there to let the Nips know we were not devils emerging from the deep ocean.

We were now told to move our equipment down to the tank deck. If you were a machine gunner, mortar man, bazooka man, or flame thrower, then you moved your equipment down to the appropriate amphibious tractor in the hole of the ship on the tank deck.

I was a flame thrower assigned to the 3rd Platoon of K Company. Actually, all of the Marines being carried on this LST were members of K Company. My flame thrower had been painted camouflage colors and checked as ready for combat. We had applied camouflage paint on each other; our faces and hands were done in individual Indian war paint style, with stripes or black, green and tan designed blotches. I moved my flame thrower down the

ladders on to the tank deck and down into the second amphibious tractor to go out of the LST.

The three man tractor crew was down there as I climbed aboard. This particular amphibious tractor had two machine guns on the front, on swivel bases, fired from standing inside the amphibious tractor. One of them was a 50 caliber air cooled machine gun, on the left, and there was a 30 caliber air cooled gun on the right. For some reason, the tank people were having trouble with the 50 caliber gun. I had been trained as a machine gunner so I asked them about the problem. They said they couldn't get the trigger mechanism to function properly. They couldn't get the firing pin to fall.

I asked them if they had checked the head space on the gun. They said they didn't know about head space, so I told them, "I believe that this machine gun, this 50 caliber is made like a 30 caliber and I can check the head space on a 30 caliber so let me try and see if it works." I set about stripping the 50 caliber down, loosening the barrel, then going through the procedures to set the head space on the gun. Reassembled in a couple of minutes time, I checked it and the trigger worked fine. They asked me if I would fire the 30 caliber on the right because that was an extra gun and normally the tank crew didn't fire that gun. I checked it and it seemed to be in good condition.

Because I was a flame thrower and would probably be one of the last people out of the tractor I was happy to volunteer to fire the gun. That way, I would get to see what was going on as we made the assault. Lieutenant Ralph Este, the 3rd Platoon Commander, did not object. In a little bit, everybody started moving down into the tractors, loading them with the proper squads, support units and everything that K Company was taking into the beach.

In 15 to 20 minutes the tractors began to start-up engines. This caused much smoke and exhaust fumes which began creating problems for us. The engines would run and stop, and then they would run again. Finally, the doors to the front of the LST were opened. With all the amphibious tractor engines running the exhaust fumes were building up inside the tank deck. I think everybody, including myself, was getting sick from the carbon monoxide gas of the running engines. Finally the command was given and amphibious tractor number one rolled out of the door. I was in amphibious tractor number two and we followed it, rolling out the door and splashing down into the cool water and the morning sky.

It was probably now about 7:00 in the morning. It was cool, clear, damp and noisy. Several thousand yards ahead, from our far left to the far right, there were clouds of rolling smoke mixed with large flashes of exploding shells and bombs. Filling our view westward behind us, there were more ships than I had ever seen at one place in my life, all gray silhouettes against the fading night sky.





As we departed our LST, there was another LST to our right. This one was unloading DUKWs (an amphibious boat shaped, multi-rubber tired truck with stern propeller) containing 105 Howitzers. As one DUKW, coming out of the front exit doors on the front ramp of the LST, went into the water it didn't come up. It just splashed into the sea with 105 Howitzer gun, people, everything. I'm not sure that anybody got out of that DUKW, although I'm sure they had on their life belts.

As the last amphibious tanks came out of our LST, we began to go in a circle. There had been many amphibious tanks going into the water from different LSTs in line. There were the regular amphibious tractors that we were in and then there were amphibious tanks with a gun turret on the top having, as I remember, a short barrel 75 millimeter cannon sticking out of the turret. After unloading, the LSTs withdrew, their place taken by several battle ships firing the main 16 inch battery guns. The fire would roll out from the muzzles of these big guns behind us. We were so close you could feel the heat from the blasts on our faces or the back of our necks.

The amphibious tractors circled. There were small boats running back and forth with flags and loud speaker phones and in a little bit of time we got into a long line. I was in the first wave of amtrack's. We were the number two tractor counting from the extreme left, and we were all set to head into the beach. The amphibious tanks with the gun turret were about 50 to 75 yards ahead of our wave, the amtrack's that were carrying infantry Marines. There was shell fire. The battleships continued firing their 16 inch guns. Airplanes were in the air. The beach was covered with smoke, fire and explosions.

Around 8:00 a.m. a signal was given. A flag was dropped and the amphibious tractors of the first wave started in. To our left about 200 yards, an LCI ship (Landing Craft Infantry medium size, shallow draft with descending ladders on both port and starboard bow, which can be fitted with rockets) with deck mounted rockets began firing salvo after salvo of rockets onto the landing beach ahead. We went through the choppy water for approximately ten minutes and we came to a reef extending the whole length of the landing beach and about 300 yards out from the sand beach. Our amtrack hit the reef, jumped, jerked, stalled, shifted its gears and began climbing up and over the reef, continuing to move in, bouncing across the reef.

I was to fire the machine gun on the right of our amtrack so I stood up on an ammunition box and kept watch on what was going on. When we were out this far almost everybody stood up to observe the action. We had not begun to receive any fire from the shore. Then, the naval gun fire had stopped and the smoke was beginning to clear. Over the island, a Navy dive bomber was making its last pass over the landing beach about 300 feet high. It just blew to a thousand pieces in front of us with parts falling to the ground. The



amtracks were going in to the beach. When we got about 200 yards from the shore we began to see splashes of water and now realized that this was people shooting at us. Some of the splashes were small, rifle bullets, machine gun bullets hitting into the water. Periodically, you would see a big splash 10 feet up in the air. Several of these were close, throwing large splashes of sea water into the tractor. It appeared to be some type of mortar or anti-boat shell. We were wet, but as far as I know, my tractor was not hit.

As we were going in, the air began to clear and you could see the tangle of burned coconut trees, the coral cliff on our left, and brush. Everything looked burned and knocked down and we continued to roll forward.

Just as the tractor rolled up to the beach, I was firing back and forth, up into the trees that remained or into any position that might have a sniper or a bigger gun. To my left, approximately 50 to 60 yards away, was a camouflaged gun embrasure and a Nip was trying to push the brush aside so he could see out. As soon as the amtrack came to a halt, the door dropped open. In the back, Lt. Este led the scramble out and across the narrow beach. One of the guys ran out of the tractor with his rifle and bayonet in the air yelling, "Heil Hitler in case we lose." (Only an 18 year old Marine in the attack could mix humor with death).

The 50 caliber gunner had fired several bursts at the exposed enemy embrasure. I let go of my machine gun, stepped down off of the ammunition box I had been standing on and put on the flame thrower and buckled it up. The assistant flame thrower and I ran out of the back of the amtrack and started down the beach to our left toward the embrasure with the brush in front of it. My assistant stopped several times to fire on it with buckshot from a 12 gauge Winchester military shotgun and, when I got within about 20 yards of the embrasure, I squeezed the flame thrower valve on and pressed forward on the igniting trigger. The firing mechanism failed to light the diesel. I ran up a little closer and tried again to fire. Again the mechanism failed. I let the flame thrower squirt for probably two or three seconds more using up about half of the fuel tank, and it still failed to light. So, we turned around and ran back down the beach to a point opposite the location of our amtrack. (I believe the bunker was later hit by Anderson with a rifle grenade which started a fire inside. It had been reported by error as being knocked out by a flame thrower.)

The amtrack was now out in the water going back for another load. There on the beach was a large shell hole about 12 feet across and 4 feet deep. Three demolition Marine engineers with their explosive charges from our amtrack were crouched in the hole. On the right edge of the hole was the upper part of a large orange colored aerial bomb with the nose up. It had been buried as an anti-tank mine in the sand. We had jumped in the hole for cover. I had discarded the flame thrower pack, gas mask and lifebelt. After a few seconds of examination all five of us left the shell hole and started running



into the tangle of burned trees and brush. Someone yelled, "Gas! Gas!" We stopped for a minute, started to return for the gas masks, but we then ran ahead.

I think the first man I saw was Lieutenant Ralph Este sitting in the brush with a big gash in his left arm above the elbow. We stopped. I began to see what the wound looked like to try to bandage it. I'm not sure whether it was a machine gun or shrapnel wound. I started to take out my first aid pack to put a bandage on it. I had cut his sleeve off but then a machine gun began firing at us and I rolled over and got out of the way. Este was now laying down on the ground, but he was alright. He said, "Give me your pistol!" So I tossed the pistol in my hand to him along with two clips of ammunition. He slid over the Tommy gun that he had and tossed to me about four ammunition magazines for the Thompson. About that time, Kelly (who was the captain's runner) ran up. He lay down beside us. I don't know where he came from, but I know that he said that we had lost all of the machine guns out in the water and there was a bunch of K Company guys dead and wounded all around the place. He said he was going to find Hunt the K Company Commander. Este told him to tell the Captain that he'd been hit but that the 3rd Platoon was going onto the top of the point.

We left Este, the assistant flame thrower and I. I keep describing my companion at this time as the assistant flame thrower because I can't remember his name or how he looked. I have a problem about Peleliu, I cannot remember seeing a dead Marine, and yet, I know I was around many of them for two days. It's almost like you take a photograph and cut out the picture of the person in it leaving the space form visible but personal features blank. You see there is a shape with that shape occupying a space. Well, I have that problem about dead Marines on Peleliu. Anyway, the assistant flame thrower and I ran on toward the "Point."

We saw several people, K Company guys; one of them was bleeding on the ground. There was lots of blood. I opened his jacket and couldn't see anything wrong so I took a knife and cut his pants open. I ripped them from the bottom all the way up to the belt to see where the blood was coming from. It was coming from low in his abdomen and it was kind of coming with the beat of his heart. There was nothing I could do about it. (Again, this is another picture I can't tell you who it was other than just that cut out space). (In Hunt's *Coral Comes High* he states in the introduction that all of the names used were real names of real persons, with one exception. During the visit he made to Austin, Texas while writing for Fortune Magazine in 1947 we discussed this exception and he said that in the book on page 56 he had said, "I saw McMatt lying on his side with a small hole in his stomach which oozed purple blood. Someone had taken off his clothes." I told him about opening the jacket and splitting off the pants legs of a marine. I could not remember his name or his face, only the small bullet hole in his lower abdomen oozing blood in slow

spurts. To the best of my memory today, Hunt told me his real name was PFC Russell J. Mattes. We were describing the same man.)

I ran up to another man. It was a guy by the name of Stieferman, I believe that was his name; he had a brother in K Company. He had been hit with shrapnel from a Japanese grenade. He said he got one of them. He did not have any shrapnel in his face, but he had it under his arms and through his chest and body, lots of the small Japanese shrapnel. We told him to just stay there; we would get a medical corpsman to him.

We went on up again a few yards more and there was a Japanese heavy machine gun sitting in a small clearing. It was the air-cooled Hotchkiss type fed by strip ammunition and there were two dead Jap bodies by the gun. Because Kelly had said all of our machine guns were lost in the water and I knew how to operate a machine gun and knew a little bit about this particular model, I dropped down behind it, cocked it, pointed it at one of the bodies and pushed the thumb trigger. It fired four or five rounds and I released the trigger. Just then a Marine came up from behind us, rolled one of the Japs over and pulled a Nambu pistol from his holster. He pushed up and continued running toward the "Point" with the pistol. I checked the other Jap body and found a silver cigarette case. I pulled it from his pocket and stuck it in mine. I picked up a dozen or so (30 round) strips of Japanese ammunition, stuffed them inside my dungaree jacket and we started hauling the machine gun to the "Point". These two Jap soldiers had on washed and ironed, spotless khaki summer uniforms with their ranks on the collar, wrapped leggings and split toe shoes.

Again we moved approximately 15 to 20 yards into an open area to the left. There wasn't much brush there. All of a sudden a Japanese soldier runs right in front of us a few yards away. By the time we could stop to shoot at him he was gone. But, we saw where he came from, a kind of dugout. We couldn't see an embrasure and it wasn't a gun position, but there was a stairway cut into the coral going down into the ground. I threw a smoke grenade (white phosphorus) down the stairway. I figured that would burn anybody out that was down there, but nobody came out. We threw a couple of regular hand grenades down and they went off. So I crawled over to where the steps were going down. As the smoke cleared I kind of rolled over and got on the steps and took a couple of steps down.

As soon as I got where I could see clearly, I could see that there was a Japanese soldier laying at the bottom of the steps. He had on an officers cloth cap, black rimmed glasses with one glass knocked out, and I could see through it to see his eye. The other lens was covered with dust and dirt. His left arm was burnt black but he was leaning on his right elbow with a Nambu pistol in his hand aimed at me. I pressed the trigger on the Tommy gun firing four or five rounds into him. I went on down the steps and into the middle of this 12



x 15 foot room. There was another officer with a sword stuck in his belly, sticking up with the handle in the air. A piece of hand grenade shrapnel had hit the blade approximately two or three inches above his belt buckle. It had bent the blade over where the shrapnel had hit the blade. I pulled the sword out and looked at it. But, because it was bent by the shrapnel, I threw it over in the back corner. There were several other Jap bodies in the back corner. I turned around and I did not see another door.



In hindsight I don't know what the cave was unless it was some kind of command facility for that area. I came back out of the dugout and, as I stepped over the body of the Jap at the bottom of the steps, I reached down and pulled the Nambu pistol out of his hand and put it into the empty scabbard where my 45 Colt had been. I climbed on out up the stairs. The assistant wanted to know if any of them had any watches. I said I didn't know and he said, "Well, wait a minute, I'm going to go look" and he walked down the steps with his shotgun. In a second or two he fired several times and came running up the steps saying, "God damn, they are alive down there." I said, "Who is alive?" He said, "Those bodies in the back, they started moving!" I said, "Well, let's go on and get this gun up there." He said, "I think I got them all anyway."

We carried the captured Jap machine gun up to the "Point." There were K Company guys, maybe 10 or 15, already there. Each had spread out and kind of picked a place to pile rocks up to get behind, space fortification. There were several marines over by the water's edge trying to reach down to get explosives into some of the Jap gun emplacements that were still operating. So, there was a lot of action going on. We put the machine gun down on the line. I believe it was either Hahn or one of the other squad leaders who told us there were a couple of guys from the machine gun platoon who said, "O.K. we'll take it". I had no desire to keep carrying that damn thing. Anyway, we turned it over to our machine gunners and they had it set up and operating in no time. Also, they found a large supply of Jap ammunition for it in some of the several bunkers which had been taken.

The Defense

I moved on down to the left and found a place about 10 feet from the edge of the cliff by the water's edge where I could get behind something and started to try and dig a shallow foxhole in this coral rock. We were being shelled by mortars. They would hit in the area of the "Point" causing rocks to fly everywhere. You just stayed down, trying to get in some kind of little wrinkle in the ground. It was very hot, some 110°, with the sun now directly above us. I think it had been reported as high as 115 ° F. Whatever it was, it was very hot. We kept on trying to improve what we had for a fortification.

I could hear several of the guys trying to knock out the final enemy group in a gun emplacement near the beach. The 1st Platoon had joined with



the 3rd Platoon as soon as the 1st Platoon hit the beach. It was in the second wave right behind us. So at about 10:00, something like that, I believe the Company Commander, George Hunt, said, "We got about 30 people up here." Lt. Willis of the 1st Platoon was with us. Parts of the two platoons, 1st and 3rd, plus parts of the other units, which were supposed to be with us, flame thrower, bazooka, machine guns, radio operators, JASCO engineers and corpsman were not here. Out of perhaps 90 people, we had only 30 men in fighting condition on top of the "Point". Damn it was hot and we were thirsty.

We were having problems from a gun firing out in front of us, on the water edge. I'm not sure how long our radio worked, but we did have radio communication at that time through to naval gun fire control and also to air support. So we were told to put the red cloth panels out in front of the line, approximately five foot by four foot size, to mark where the front of our line was so the airplanes could see it and not shoot us. Anyway, we put the panels out. This was about noon and you could see the F4U Corsairs. I think there were three or four of them. They came down and leveled off a thousand or so yards out from the beach, right on top of the water maybe ten feet above the water and headed straight for us. As they got closer, in a few seconds, you could see their guns begin to fire and see the flashes. I swear, it looked like they were aiming straight at us. You can't get down, you can't dig in, you can't do anything. These planes are coming at you just shooting away. I think they had three guns on each wing. That's six guns on each plane and there were one after another taking turns coming in to attack.

They would come over the cliffs edge and pull up, clearing us by 20 or 30 feet. As they passed, it rained down empty 50 caliber shell cases. I don't think they were really shooting at us; they were probably shooting 30 or 40 yards ahead of us, but my God, they scared the hell out of us. Hunt ordered them to stop on the radio and asked for naval gun fire. We knew what was going on because he told us what he was doing at the time. I could hear him talk on the radio. He was very close to my position in front on the cliff's edge where he could see what was going on. In a few minutes there was either a cruiser or destroyer that came right up as close as they could get to the reef, at full speed, and it fired three rounds from its 5 inch guns. It hit exactly where the Captain had indicated we were getting fire from. After that pass by that ship we had no more trouble with that particular gun.

Things were quiet for a while. It was getting hotter and we were getting thirstier. Your lips cracked and your mouth became dry and our two canteens were empty. You sweated and sweated. You weren't hungry but you were very thirsty. Out in front of where the red panels had been laid on the ground, a few yards this side of the bunker destroyed with naval gun fire, were the bodies of two Jap officers, with Samurai swords, pistols, field glasses and canteens. Maggots were crawling all over them. They must have been there several days, from the first bombardment. I kept looking at their canteens. I



crawled out along the cliff edge in the bright hot afternoon sun and very carefully cut only the two canteens off with my K-bar knife. I was careful not to set off any booby traps. I crawled over a few yards to my left and eased myself down into the ankle deep Pacific water and worked my way back to a position behind our lines below the cliff.

That afternoon late, a single amphibious tractor made it to "The Point". The crew (four black Marines, the first I had ever seen) dropped the door and started unloading and carrying to us boxes of ammo, hand grenades and a flame thrower. Also, they brought us some water. The water was brought up in a 55 gallon drum, but the drum had not been cleaned and the water tasted awful, sickening. It was oil and water and no way could we drink it. So, when you got a chance you went out, found some dead Jap bodies and took their canteens. Right now water was the most precious thing we needed. Hunt got the Marines from the amtrack to give us their 30 caliber machine gun and ammo. There were several K Company guys that had gotten lost and they brought them up, too. I was down to two Tommy gun clips, but I had picked up a nice Japanese rifle with several cartridge belts and had them laying next to my shallow foxhole and pile of rocks.

There was another Marine with me now. His name was Johnson. (I don't know what happened to the assistant flame thrower, he is just gone from my memory.) Johnson was from Utah. We talked for a little bit. We talked about Bill Elderton. Bill Elderton was my best buddy and he had been a bazooka team leader. I hadn't seen him since we left LST 227. Johnson told me that as he first started coming in on the beach, within two or three minutes, Jap machine gun fire had hit the stock of his rifle and killed Bill Elderton, who was right behind him. Bill was from Springdale, Arkansas. Later on I got to know his son, who now lives in Vicksburg, Mississippi and met his brother and mother.

The supply crew took out our wounded. I don't know what the count was right now. I do know they also brought a flame thrower fuel back tank and firing tube. I set the flame thrower down by the command post (CP). It came with the nitrogen bottle separate and you had to be very careful when you attached the nitrogen bottle to the flame thrower tanks and opened the pressure valve from the nitrogen tank to the fuel tank. You open the valve slowly and hopefully it does not break the pressure relief valve that allows pressure to move from the nitrogen tank under high pressure to the two tanks containing the fuel. What I didn't think of at that time was that the nitrogen tank had been sitting out in the hot sun at 115 degrees for a long time and if it was filled at a relatively cool time, it had quite a bit more pressure in it than what it was rated to hold.

Anyway, I screwed the nitrogen tank onto the regulator valve and very slowly opened the nitrogen valve to allow pressure to go through the

regulator into the top of the flame thrower tanks. As I did, the valve burst and sent a fine, cold spray of diesel up into the air. I was so hot and so dirty, the diesel felt so cool and so good, that I sat down on top of the flame thrower and let the diesel spray on me. Not a darn thing I could do about it anyway. I just told a couple of guys close to me not to light up any cigarettes. The thing was useless without the nitrogen valve.

After getting cooled down personally and all the pressure bled off the equipment, I started to go down to see if I could find the original flame thrower that I had left on the beach. It just didn't have a functioning nozzle that would operate to ignite the fuel. It had about one-half a tank of fuel still left and pressure in the nitrogen tank. So I was going to go down and exchange the lighting mechanisms which would provide us with an operating system. As I started to walk down toward the beach and toward the area that we had come in, somebody yelled, "Fox, Japs are all over there." I said, "They're what? Hell, we were just there." They said "Yea, but they've come in now. We are isolated up here." I said, "No, I just left the flame thrower down there". They said, "No, you can't go down there, the Japs are there." I took about ten more steps down the beach, hesitated and thought for a minute, and I concluded, "No, I think I'll believe him. I don't have to get shot in the head to prove him wrong." So I went back up to my little pile of rocks.

Johnson had been there while I was away. I sat down and all of a sudden I heard a shot off to my right. I heard somebody yell, "Corpsman!" Just at the time of the shot I saw something move up in a tree about 100 yards away. I told Johnson and the guys closest to us, "I think I see this one." I took the Japanese army rifle and took it off safe, raised the sight, set the sight at approximately 100 meters, got in a sitting position in my little stack of rocks and took aim on something in the top of the tree. I squeezed the trigger and fired. I saw something fall from the tree. As it fell, a couple of guys who had been watching me yelled, "Whoopie! You got him! You got him!" I guess I did.

Later, as I was sitting there, I picked up the Jap silver cigarette case I had liberated earlier this morning. I opened it and inside were 5 cigarettes and one half of a cigarette that had been broken in two. The other half had been smoked and the remaining half saved for later. Also, inside were two photos, one 2 x 2 photo of a Jap soldier in a winter uniform with a fur hat. The other photo was larger, about 3 x 4. It was of five people in a posed family picture, an older couple dressed in dark kimonos seated with two daughters standing by an older son in uniform. These two photos I would recognize today, over 51 years later.

Then, I pulled the Nambu pistol out of my scabbard. The safety was in the fire position, forward. I aimed the pistol out to the front and pulled the trigger. The pistol would not fire, something was wrong with it. I looked it

over and there behind the safety was a small shrapnel hole about the size of a kitchen match head. I cocked the pistol again and tried to fire it several times. I worked on the safety but it would not rotate. I removed the clip and could see nothing wrong, only the small hole in the pistol's frame. My guardian angel had been on my shoulder all of that day. I discarded the Nambu and later acquired another 45 Colt which I put in my holster.

We were beginning to prepare for the night. I guess we all knew that something unpleasant was going to happen this night. This was the Japanese's time. This was their time to fight. As it began to get darker, Hunt and Willis checked the perimeter to be sure everyone was prepared for the night. The squad leaders were Webber and Hahn and I don't remember who else. (You remember the guys who weren't there such as Koval, McNeel, Elderton, Calvin Smith, and Sutkaitis, as well as "Whitey" Hudson from Moscow, Texas and the other friends we had before we got on the beach.)

Anyway, we were getting ready to fight. The Tommy gun was sitting there next to me. The Jap rifle was there and we had some hand grenades that were brought in by the supply tractor. We were going to do our best. I understood that the Japanese machine gun we had acquired and brought up on the "Point" was sitting over there not far away along with a big stack of Jap ammunition. The machine gun crew was getting ready to use it all night.

After dark, Johnson and I had been laying down on our backs with our feet forward, Jap cartridge belts for our pillows and our weapons by our sides. We would take turns trying to nap about an hour each. In the quiet of this clear starlit night about 9:00 p.m., to our right I could see a dark shadow slowly moving toward our little foxhole. It was bent over and now within ten feet of me. I took the Jap rifle off of safety and rotated the muzzle toward the shadow. Johnson and I held our breath as the shadow bent over our foxhole with the rifle muzzle now only six inches from the shadow's chest, "Sh-h-h Fox" came the sound from the shadow. I said, "Dammit put your hand in front of your chest." He touched the muzzle with his hand, and laid down by my right knee. I do not remember his name or what he wanted, but it almost cost him his life. I got some sleep. Johnson did not sleep at all.

Some time between 11 and 12 p.m., we heard movement out in front. You got a feeling something was going to happen. Then it all started. We did a lot of shooting, a lot of grenade throwing. There was screaming and a lot of explosions. We did not have any artillery to help us this first night. We had to rely on our own hand grenades and our rifles and the two machine guns. But there was activity, one heck of a lot of it. In about fifteen minutes, things began to slow down a little bit. Every once in a while, there would be another burst of gunfire or so. Flares had been lighting up the night. Though we couldn't talk to them or communicate with them, the battalion mortars had heard the

noise up here. They shot flares up for us which helped a hell of a lot. The fight was over.

The rest of the night we didn't have a lot of firing, just periodically, an enemy mortar shell would drop here and there. Sometimes, there would be a scream. In *Coral Comes High*, Captain Hunt's story of the "Point", he said we finished this first night with only 18 of us remaining, including he and Lt. Willis. The Jap bodies of this first night battle were numbered as about 100 by his count.

As the dawn arrived, we began to have a great baseball game, a contest of who can throw the hand grenade the farthest with the most accuracy. Right close to me, just four or five yards on my right, there were several K Company guys and they had several boxes of hand grenades that weren't used up in the night. They were having a hand grenade throw-off with some Japs out in front, probably 50 yards, just barely within hand grenade range. There was a big coral rock in front where our guys could stand up and get a nice throw at the Japs. The Japanese would throw back with their grenades hitting the rock which then would roll off to one side or the other. That rock had two sides. One of them was my side while the other one was somebody else's side. As these Jap grenades would roll off they would come over by me to blow up. I kept watching them, kind of hoping that all of this stuff would die down, but I guess they kept it up for 15 minutes. Finally I think we got the better of them. The Japs quit and that ended the grenade throwing on this the morning of the 16th.

Jap mortar shells were still coming in every fifteen or twenty minutes, but a few of them went over the cliff into the shallow water on our left flank. By the afternoon Johnson still had not closed his eyes since the landing. Suddenly, he jumped up yelling and screaming, just standing up waving his arms. I grabbed him around the legs and yelled for a corpsman. In short order somebody was up there helping me. We held him down while they gave him a shot. It kind of relaxed him. He just lay there while they picked him up and carried him off. Later, I heard he was back in the States in a hospital, and he was doing well.

Several times during the day I went down to the water in front of the gun emplacements to wash my hands and face to cool off a little bit. I talked to the captain. He was down in front of one of the former Jap gun emplacements. He had made it the company command post. I talked with a Navajo Indian radio operator; the radio wasn't working at that time. He got up on the beach with Hunt and was shooting like everybody else. Again, we didn't have communication at that time. Two officers came up on the "Point", I don't really know exactly when, but one of them was named Hagerdy. He was from artillery. Then, there was one named Monk Meyers who had swum around the reef. Later on, years later in a Texas oil field I ran into Monk's brother, Bill

Meyers. This would have been back in the early 1950s. He told me Monk had been killed on Peleliu. Meyers was from Col. Pullers' regimental headquarters sent down to figure out how the "Point" was holding out.

Sometime, I'm guessing about 4:00 in the afternoon, we had communication. I don't know where it came from, but the word was being passed that B Company had broken through the Japanese counterattack lines and were now tied in with us. At that time we started getting equipment from them. We started getting tractors in from the reef bringing in equipment. They were bringing in machine guns and mortars and some of the K Company people. Bandy, with his gangster-style Tommy gun slung on his shoulder, showed up. He was guide of 2nd platoon. LaCoy, showed up. All of the mortar people that had been down the beach and separated were now in full contact. We had liaison with 81 millimeter mortars and LaCoy with the 60 millimeter mortars were getting all tied in. We also had K Company people that had been separated from us by an antitank ditch. Some guys were left over from the 2nd Platoon, while some were the machine gunners that had been separated.

Now, we probably had 40 maybe 50 people up on the "Point." We were ready to fight. Hunt sent out a patrol with Sgt. Hahn and five or six men going forward several hundred yards to scout the Jap lines. A fire fight started. Hahn got back with one killed and two wounded.

They were issuing out cases of hand grenades. Just about everybody had their own case. We got ammunition for our MI rifles, BARs (Browning Automatic Rifle firing semi or full automatic with 20 30-06 caliber rounds in each magazine) and Tommy guns and now there must have been five or six American 30 caliber machine guns up on the line. It was beginning to turn into late afternoon.

The sun was still bright. It must have been about 5:30 p.m. when the Jap mortars started firing. It seemed as if their registry was set too far. Round after round went over the "Point" just clearing the cliff and hit 20 or 30 yards long, out in the shallow water of the reef. Many of them were hitting slightly ahead of our defense perimeter. Duke and I just hugged the bottom of our shallow foxhole and hoped none of their rounds fell near. (With 51 years of review in my mind, I now believe this was not an error in their range, but that they were clearing out any defenses below the cliff, which they were unable to see, and checking the registry of their mortars in preparation for the later attempt by night to envelope our left flank in the shallow water).

Hunt was walking around cautiously, checking everything to be sure that everybody was ready for a busy night because he figured we were going to get it now for sure. He came by the far left flank where Duke and I were located (Duke had come over and he and I were now sharing the shallow foxhole). We talked for a little bit, and Hunt said he was afraid of the area. We weren't sure of the size of depression over there. If the Japanese could move a significant

number of troops into that position and then counterattack directly at our left flank, they would be too close for our mortars or artillery to be of any help. We had no barbed wire out on the left flank.

I told him that I had crawled out there before to cut some canteens off of the two dead Jap officers and I could go out there when it got dark and listen. There was a place where I could crawl down to the water's edge along the cliff. I would come back if I heard anything and let him know if they were coming in this area. When you try to move around on the coral, it's hard to do it real quietly. You are always knocking little pieces of coral around as you move. Hunt said O.K.

As the evening got darker and we all got ready I took the Colt 45 pistol and a couple of hand grenades and gave the Tommy gun and other grenades to Duke who also had his BAR. I crawled out to where the two Jap officers' bodies were ahead of the line, close to the edge of the water, by the cliff. I just laid there quietly. With nobody there for conversation, I just listened. You could hear the water splashing against the rock at the bottom of the cliff. The tide was going out then. Everything else was quiet. Then, there was a shot. I think it was a case where one of the new guys was unsettled and there was some shooting and yelling about that back in our lines. Otherwise, things were pretty quiet.

About midnight the Japs really started the action. They began with mortars and then followed with everything else, almost a Banzai charge. It was gunfire, shooting, machine guns, and hand grenades, everything they had available. Of course, we did the same thing. Every gun opened up in the area where the major part of the attack was taking place, center right of the "Point" and close to where the Japanese breakthrough had been on the first afternoon. There was a hell of a lot of fighting over there and a hell of a lot of firing. Because I didn't hear anything on the far left flank, I didn't do anything. I just lay quiet.

There were plenty of flares up in the air lighting up the coral rock and the trees and knocked down brush. You could see the flares cast a shadow on the water from the top of the cliff. This went on, I don't know, fifteen minutes, twenty minutes, just one hell of a lot of firing going on. I think Hunt had gotten the battalion's 81 millimeters mortars firing, the regimental artillery was firing and LaCoy was pumping in the rounds from all our available 60MM mortars. But, at some point in a battle you get a quiet minute. Just something happens; maybe, the machine gunner runs out of ammunition and reaches for another belt. Or, the mortar men say wait a minute, let's see if we need any more shells. I don't know the exact cause. But at times, there are little quiet periods, maybe a few seconds, maybe a minute. During one of these periods, I heard somebody speaking Japanese out in the water in front of me.

Perhaps it was 30 feet to 50 feet away, I don't know exactly. From out over the water in front of me, I heard this voice. I made a foolish decision. I assumed the noise would be the front of a Jap column along the bottom of the cliff. I guess I didn't think. I just said to myself, that's the lead Jap out in the water in front of me. I began to ease down and crawl down the cliff to where I could walk back to Hunt's command post. It was about 30 to 40 yards behind me at the water level in front of one of the captured Jap bunkers.

When I turned and stepped down into the water, the water was about one to two inches deep here. The tide was out, the waves were splashing against the rock. I guess I took one step, maybe two, but I heard a step behind me in the water and I turned around as fast as I could. In turning, I hit a bayonet that had started into my chest and knocked it out of the way. It had hit a rib just enough to cut the skin. It cut through my jacket and cut a 4 inch by one-half inch deep slash through the flesh on my left chest. I had the pistol in my hand; it was cocked and loaded but I didn't shoot the man. I hit him in the face with it. I'm sure I hit him as hard as I could. He immediately dropped the rifle which I took (the pistol had dropped from my right hand) and bayoneted him with the bayonet on his rifle. I pulled it out and started yelling "Nips!" and kept yelling "Nips!"

In a second or two there were another two or three Japs starting after me. Then, there was an explosion, and I went down. I was hit along the left side with five chunks of steel in my left leg and left arm. I guess everybody went down. Then there was another Jap! I was still yelling "Nips!" He started to bayonet me and I started rolling out into the water to get into the flare light, hoping Duke could help. As I rolled out into the flare light, I was bayoneted two times, once in the neck, once more across the back.

Sitting on the cliff, Duke could now see what was going on and he started firing to support me. As soon as he started firing from the top of the cliff some 30 yards away, the Japs left me alone and started trying to climb the cliff to get to Duke. What happened to me then, I'm not sure. I lay in the water. I remember certain periods of time I would look out of the corner of my eye to the left and I could see wrap leggings and boots, the kind with the big toe separate, about three feet away from me. I looked to the right and I could see the shoulder of a Jap uniform another several feet to the other side laying in the water with me. I wasn't dead. I didn't have a pistol.

Returning on My Shield

I just lay there quiet in the water. At times, I am sure I passed out. Sometime I would come back. Hunt had ordered a machine gun to be set up in the water within a few feet of his command post. The gun fired across the water over me and against the cliff. I had no idea of time. Sometimes the flares would be lit. Sometime they would go out and it would be dark only with the

stars. At one time when the flares were lit for a period of time, I felt I was talking to my father (he had died in 1940) and I promised him, if he would get me out of this place, I would be the best little boy he'd ever had.

This went on until sometime just before daybreak, just as the first crack of the sun starts showing over the horizon. I began to get water in my mouth. The tide was beginning to come in. It was splashing in my face, and perhaps, that was what woke me up. I had to make a decision, since I couldn't get up. So I called out, "Corpsman." Immediately, a loud voice called back saying, "What in the hell are you doing out there?" Those were his exact words. I said "I don't know, but I can't get up." Then the voice came back and said "O.K. I'll come get ye." I went blank about that time and I don't remember first hand who came to get me. Later on I found out it was the machine gunner that Hunt had moved out into the water to set up fire against the Japs who were coming around our left flank.

The next morning I was told there were 30 or 40 bodies floating back and forth with the waves. So how many Japs were there initially? I don't know. The Marine machine gunner was a guy by the name of Andy Byrnes. In the 1970's I met Byrnes' son, a Vietnam Marine. His father had died the year before. He went with me to one of the "Old Breed" reunions. I found out from Hunt after the war that Andy did a hell of a brave thing to come out in the open and pick me up. As soon as he started gathering me up to bring back to safety, according to Hunt, the Japs started firing at him. The end result was that he got me back to the shore and did so, I think, without being hit. (Andy Byrnes received the Silver Star for his bravery.) I was put on a stretcher. I don't remember any dealings with corpsman. I was not aware if I was alive or dead.

I guess it was about 10:00 in the morning and it was getting hot. I was laying on a stretcher in the sun on my stomach and had my head on my arms. I felt a hand reach down to check my pulse. When I felt that hand on my wrist, I jerked my head up and looked at him and said, "Mac do you have any water?" Whoever it was, jumped about a foot and kind of gave a laugh and said, "Sure I'll get you some." And then, he brought me water. I stayed there probably for another hour until there was a tractor that came in with available space. They loaded us, the wounded from that night's battle. I don't know how many of us there were.

Later on I came to understand that we whipped the hell out of the Japs and that over 400 Japanese had been counted killed. Some were stacked two deep in places out in front of the lines. Anyway, I was taken by an amtrack out to the deep water so I could be transferred to a boat that would get me to the ship Tryon. This was a transport ship, but it was also rigged up for wounded from Peleliu.



I was brought aboard the ship and laid on the deck for another hour or so. Then it got to be my turn and they took me into the operating room where the doctor looked at me. I remember he said, "Where are you hurt?" I said, "Well, on my leg and my back and neck. My arm, I can't use my left arm." He told the navy corpsman to put a needle in my arm and he then said, "No, wait a minute. Don't put him to sleep yet. I want to see what we have to do here." So while I was sitting up on this operating table, he decides to cut the bandages that the corpsman on the beach had put on that morning. Of course it was slopped with dried blood. (In fact I did not have on any clothes. All had been cut off on the beach.) I do remember when he cut through the neck bandage and ripped it off; that was the shock of my life, to tear that bandage off of that bayonet cut. All of a sudden you could feel the blood begin to run again and it was warm and felt very funny. He then told the navy corpsman, "You go ahead and put him to sleep now."

So I went to sleep and woke up later down in the hole of the ship on a lower bunk. Still later, I was talking to a man in khaki with U.S. Air Corps wings on his collar and gold major leaves on his shoulders. He was trying to get me to take a little water. I started to laugh; he responded, "What are you laughing about?" I said, "It's pretty first class to have a Major taking care of a PFC." He said, "Well, I'll tell you what fellow, it's an honor to do it; and, until we can go in and fly our planes we're going to sit here and take care of everyone of you."

For several days the major and other Army Air Corps officers would help us eat our meals. They told us they flew the Black Widow night fighters, a plane I had never seen. They were waiting for the Peleliu airfield to be repaired, after which, they could take their turn at the Japs. (While writing this tale and still not knowing about the Black Widow night fighter, I questioned an old B-24 bomber pilot friend. The P-61, Black Widow night fighter, was built by Northrop Aviation, as land based, with twin engines and twin tail booms. It had a top speed of over 400 mph, was armed with multi 20mm cannons, and specifically was designed for the use of attack radar at night. All aircraft were painted dull black.)

After a short time the ship took us on to Manus Island in the Admiralties to a naval hospital. We stayed there for a few days. I don't remember exactly how many. (In Manus Naval Hospital there were no nurses.) One morning the doctor, dressed in his Tshirt and white undershorts, came to my bed. In this tropical climate, with all of my cuts and wounds, I was uncovered in the bed, dressed only with my bandages. Every day they would change the bandages and that was about an hour proposition. It was a job putting greased gauze into the five shrapnel holes in my left thigh followed by dressing the various bayonet wounds with the greased bandages with sulfur powder. The doctor commented, "That's some cut you got on your neck." "Yea, I guess it is," I said. He retorted, "What do you mean you guess it is?"

And I replied, "I've never seen it." He said "You've never seen the cut on your neck?" And I said, "No sir." So he asked the corpsman to go get a mirror. With the mirror, the doctor said, "Take a look at this. You are a pretty lucky fellow." When I saw it, sure enough, I agreed I was a very lucky boy.

Like everybody else I went on back to the States and spent an eight month tour of duty in hospitals. Ultimately, a VA hospital was the last before I was discharged. That was the end of my war story. Twenty years later, with my first return to the Island of Peleliu, it was evident I was still affected by the events of the past.

To write this story with only 51 years of memories of my ten foot circle of space would have been impossible but for Capt. George P. Hunt's "Point Secured" Marine Corps Gazette January 1945 article, his book *Coral Comes High* Harper & Brothers copyright 1946, Hunt's visit to see his men as reported in "Honorable Discharge" Fortune Magazine Sept. 1947, four visits of mine back to the "Point" Sept. 1964, 1970, 1982 and Sept. 1994, and hours of personal conversations with old comrades Capt. Hunt, Sgt. Dick Webber, Corporal Joe Darino, and recent personal contact with Sgt. Henry Hahn, Sgt Joe LaCoy, and Eric Mailander, a young man who is presently working on a history of the battle of the "Point" Peleliu Sept. 15 and 16, 1944.

On my first return to Peleliu Island on September 15, 1964, I found my K-Bar knife in the location of my little foxhole. It was very rusted, with no leather, but still with the hilt-guard bent up. I have it today.

Perhaps in the not too distant future, the size of a warrior's ten foot circle may be reduced to the arc of a computer operator's chair.

July 12, 1996
Austin, Texas